

Festivals – Feast of Kun Iam

In China, on different dates of the lunar calendar, four festivities are held in honor of Kun Iam, Goddess of Mercy: February 19 (birthday), June 19 (day of enlightenment), September 19 (day of ascension) and November 19 (day of assumption as sea goddess). On these dates, there are many activities and celebrations in the temples dedicated to this divinity. February 19, Kun Iam birth date, is especially celebrated with grandiose celebrations.

In Buddhism, the name “Kun Iam” (Sanskrit: अवलोकितेश्वर, or “Avalokiteśvara”) means “The one who discerns the cries of the world”. The one on the left of Buddha Amida is Avalokiteśvara, representing great compassion, and the one on the right is “Mahāsthāmaprāpta”, representing the power of wisdom. Together, they are known as “Three Saints of the West”. Widely known in Buddhism, Avalokiteśvara, god of compassion and forgiveness, a Buddha shows himself in different forms, including the feminine one; and he is known by the Chinese people as “Kun Iam” (or “Guan Yin” in Mandarin), who liberates beings from disturbance and suffering.

This stamp issue is illustrated with productions of images of works by the well-known Macao painter Sou Farong (formerly known as Sou Man), representing three manifestations of Kun Iam: “Kun Iam with Lotus”, “Kun Iam with Branch of Willow” and “Peaceful Kun Iam” :

“**Kun Iam with Lotus**” represents the goddess Kun Iam, standing in the middle of a lotus flower. In Buddhism, the lotus is a symbol of purity and enlightenment. The Buddha Land is called the supreme joy and the supreme joy is pure lotus land, as stated by “Buddha Sutra”: “In the land of supreme joy there are lakes adorned with seven kind of precious stones In these lakes, lotus flowers are as big as carriage wheels.” Thus, the Land of Buddha is also “land of lotus”.

“**Kun Iam with Willow Branch**” is also known as “Healer Kun Iam”; Chinese have long believed that the willow branch has magical healing powers. “Kun Iam with Willow Branch” is the first of the 33 Kun Iam expressions. The image of this seal represents Kun Iam holding a willow branch to heal diseases and suppress the suffering of the world.

“Peaceful Kun Iam” is the image of Kun Iam free of disturbances and worries. Observing the world can bring benefits to oneself and to the other. Being merciful gives happiness and compassion to eliminate disturbances, thus, most of disturbed people can be free of worries and suffering.

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